

Basics of Planning Theory

What Is Planning?

Everybody plans – we all make financial plans, travel plans, and work plans to help us achieve personal goals and objectives. Organizations and firms plan for strategic reasons and to gain a competitive edge. Plans help us to organize our time and to work toward our goals in a step-by-step fashion.

Planning is a widely used process that typically includes the steps below.

The Planning Process



People from all walks of life, and communities as well, use this method to prepare for the future, solve problems, clarify needs and objectives, set priorities, and achieve goals. Here are two definitions of community planning.

Planning is a process of preparing in advance, and in a reasonably systematic fashion, recommendations for programs and courses of action to attain the common objectives of the community. – (Anthony Catanese)

We define planning as a process for determining appropriate future action through a sequence of choices. – (Davidoff & Reiner, A Choice Theory of



Planning, Journal of American Planning Association, 1962)

Professional planners use the planning process as a procedure to address a broad range of issues in a pragmatic, impartial, and rational way.

A planner may use the planning process when addressing a single subject or a wide range of subjects, such as capital improvements, housing, or transportation. Comprehensive planning covers a wide range of interrelated topics that are of concern to the community. Documents that result from this process are called comprehensive plans, general plans, or master plans.

Community volunteers and planning board members can employ the same planning process that professional planners use. As the definitions above suggest, when communities engage in planning, they seek answers to such fundamentally important questions as

- What are the common goals and objectives of my community?
- What might happen to my community in the future?
- What do we want to happen?
- How best can we achieve the future outcome we desire?

Why Do Communities Plan?

Communities plan in order to improve the quality of public choices and decisions. Some communities do not plan until they encounter a crisis that demands an immediate public decision; then they hastily construct their plans after considering only a limited number of actions.

Having a master plan is worthwhile for the following reasons:

1. Planning is a means of preparing for the future. Planning enables us to look before we leap and avoid costly and sometimes embarrassing mistakes. Through planning, we come to understand what must be done now and in the future to achieve our goals.
2. Planning makes sense. For a community, planning involves working together to balance competing interests. Planning also forces people to think and organize their time, resources, and efforts.
3. Planning helps the community recognize its priorities. With a master plan, local officials can address the most urgent needs first.
4. Planning is intended to serve the public interest. Planning does not attempt to stop or replace market forces of supply, demand, and price, but to guide those forces by establishing rules for development and growth.

5. Planning helps the community set sound policies for development. A master plan makes it easier for private developers and builders to respect and understand community desires and public policies as they develop their individual projects.

6. Planning helps identify both the positive and negative aspects of a community. What is good should be protected; what is bad should be changed; what is possible should be done.

7. Planning helps to maintain a satisfactory quality of life. In towns with a decreasing population, planning may offer ways to maintain a positive quality of life and revitalize the community. In growing communities, planning offers a way to protect and, if possible, enhance the quality of life.

8. The planning process is a means of educating people about their community. Developing a master plan provides an opportunity for public participation in the decision-making process.

As suggested in *Planner on a Disc*, there are a number of practical reasons why communities should prepare a master plan or update an existing plan. Here is an abridged version of some of those reasons.

- to ensure that growth and development is orderly and predictable
- to save taxpayers money by avoiding premature development and costly sprawl
- to plan efficiently for capital improvements
- to circumvent frivolous legal challenges and law suits by minimizing their likelihood
- to provide greater certainty to property owners and developers regarding what to expect with regard to growth and development
- to protect environmental resources and aesthetic qualities
- to strengthen local identity
- to ensure that basic infrastructure and public facilities and services will keep pace with new development
- to make local decision-making more open and democratic
- to ensure fairness and avoid favoritism
- to ensure that development meets local needs

Why Should Your Community Want to Prepare a Master Plan?

A master planning effort should be undertaken only when the community understands the purpose, needs, and benefits of planning. As stated in *Planner on a Disc*, a master plan should be

- descriptive in articulating the desires of the community into a vision statement
- productive in setting forth goals and objectives for the community's future
- part of a continuous planning process that is timely and responsive to the needs and desires of the community
- prescriptive in defining the legal basis for land use regulations and a capital improvement program

How Much Will It Cost to Prepare a Master Plan?

Unfortunately, master plans cost money. If your town or city is unwilling to spend money preparing a plan, then it will probably be difficult to prepare one. The amount of money required can vary considerably, depending on the type of plan you prepare and the nature and duration of the planning process you follow.

One way to estimate how much you should budget is to evaluate the plans that neighboring, or other similar-sized communities, have recently prepared and then find out how much each of those communities spent on preparing its plan. Another approach is to ask a planning consultant or your regional planning commission to give you a rough estimate. This estimate can then be refined based on what you decide to include in your plan.

Most planning consultants charge in the range of \$50 to \$100 an hour, depending upon their level of expertise and how far they have to travel to reach your community. Determining the number of hours can be difficult. Unfortunately, there is no generalized rule of thumb to estimate the cost, which could vary anywhere from \$30,000 to \$50,000 to prepare a new master plan for a community with a population

of under 10,000, and \$50,000 to \$100,000 for a large municipality.

As described in *Planner on a Disc*, some of the factors that affect the cost of preparing a master plan are as follows:

- the amount of citizen participation and the number of community and/or neighborhood meetings and events held during the planning process
- the level of agreement or disagreement in the community (that is, how fragmented or divided the community is on key issues)
- the geographic specificity you want your plan to achieve, and the amount of work that needs to be done to prepare digitized maps and upgrade GIS to that level
- the extent to which newsletters and mailings are used to keep citizens informed and involved in the planning process
- the amount of effort put into different methods of disseminating information to the citizens at all stages of the planning process, and the number of different methods employed
- the extent to which the community uses computer technology to increase citizen involvement in the planning process (by creating an interactive webpage and/or making use of email)
- the nature and content of the final plan – how comprehensive it is and the level of detail required
- the form in which the plan is published, the number of copies of different versions (full versions and executive summaries), whether it contains color maps and photographs, and whether copies of the plan are given away or whether a fee is charged
- the length of time allotted to the planning process

As the above list suggests, many of the factors that affect the ultimate cost of preparing a master plan are directly or indirectly related to the amount of time and effort expended in involving citizens in the planning process, in keeping people informed, and in making sure that important policy decisions and choices are publicly and openly discussed. Thus, there are very real risks in trying to prepare “cheap” master plans. The less money you budget for the important task of involving and informing citizens, the greater the risk that you will end up preparing a plan that lacks broad-based public support.

Helpful Hint: Before determining your budget, first decide on the contents of the plan, the type of master plan you would like to prepare, and what planning approach would work best for your community. (For information about what should be included, the different types of master plans, and the various approaches to planning see Chapter 3, “What Should Be Included in Your Master Plan,” and the section on Different Ways to Plan within this chapter.)

How Long Will It Take to Prepare a Master Plan?

The type of master plan you prepare and the amount of data you collect will have a direct bearing on the length of the planning process. Comprehensive master plans typically take much longer to prepare than plans that focus on a limited number of key issues or that pertain only to a limited part of your community. Some communities have taken three or more years to prepare a comprehensive plan; others have succeeded in preparing comprehensive master plans in six months to a year.

As stated in *Planner on a Disc*, when thinking about how long the planning process will take, keep in mind that the length of time it takes to prepare a plan can be affected by

- the geographic size and diversity of your municipality
- the complexity of the land use and development issues your community faces
- the degree of agreement or disagreement within your community regarding pressing problems, priorities, and possible courses of action
- your community’s track record or degree of past success in plan-making
- the degree to which local elected officials understand and support the need for planning
- the extent to which local citizens feel that local government representatives and local government boards and commissions understand their concerns and represent their interests

Once work has begun, there is a tendency for the people involved to feel that it is imperative to get the

plan finished as quickly as possible. Often this feeling of urgency is based on a fear of what might happen in the interim, while the plan is being prepared. The desire to complete the plan quickly can also be motivated by a desire to reduce the cost. But if you make the planning process too short, you may undermine public support for the plan in the long run.

Helpful Hint: Take as much time as needed to prepare your master plan, so that everyone can be proud of it and it has broad-based public support. But don’t take so long that you lose momentum. (For more information about the different types of master plans and the various approaches to preparing your plan, refer to the section on Different Ways to Plan within this chapter.)

Is Hiring a Professional Planning Consultant Necessary?

You may assume that a master plan can only be prepared by a professional planner. Professional planners have a great deal to contribute to the planning process. But the planning process is essentially a process of translating community values into public policy for the future. You can’t hire someone to do that for you.

Planning board members, whether elected or appointed, are important political leaders in their community. Working in conjunction with the political leaders on other boards and committees, they can articulate the community’s values and recommend policy. There is a lot you can accomplish, and have the responsibility to accomplish, without deferring to professional planners.

In contemporary thinking, a community does not hire a professional planner to “prepare a plan for us.” The professional planner, whether a hired consultant or public staff, should assist the leadership of the community in identifying common goals and policies. It would be presumptuous for a planner to state what they are. Whether you have a planner to work with or not, community goals and policies are uniquely in the province of the planning board.

The strengths of professional planners are best utilized during the steps that occur before and after the plan formulation – in technical analysis and techniques for implementing the master plan. They can perform a number of studies that identify trends affecting your community; and the professional planner is particularly skilled in the implementation stage – identifying ways to carry out goals and policies. The planner can also point out the potential implications of various alternatives. In the formulation of the master plan, the professional planner is best seen as a resource for policy makers. Professional planners are skillful at outlining citizen participation techniques, translating expressions of community values into goals and policies, and the technical draftsmanship of policies in the plan.

If you want to produce an effective master plan, it makes sense to hire and make use of professional planning assistance. Even cities and towns that have full-time planners often seek assistance from professional planning consultants or the local regional planning commission in carrying out much of the related work. There are a number of reasons to do so.

First, planners employed by the community have a responsibility to administer and defend existing land use regulations. It can be difficult to perform that duty and, at the same time, propose a different set of regulations.

Second, when making major policy decisions in the future, it may be necessary for citizens and elected officials to face up to some hard choices. An independent, outside planning consultant is in the best position to objectively frame and put controversial policy choices before the community without the interference of political pressures.

Last but not least, hiring an outside planning consultant is a way to introduce fresh perspectives and viewpoints into the planning process.

Nevertheless, local staff planners should, and can, play important roles in the process of preparing a plan, and in managing and overseeing the work of a planning consultant. If you have a full-time city or town planner and choose to hire an outside planning consultant, be sure to ask your planner to play a

major role in drafting the scope of services for the planning consultant and to participate in the planning process.

Some Helpful Hints in Preparing Your Plan

As identified by the planners who prepared *Planner on a Disc*, below are a number of helpful hints to keep in mind as you proceed.

- Developing a plan is not easy, but it can be fun.
- Preparing a plan for the future requires leadership and risk-taking.
- Planning is controversial – but so is *not* planning.
- People find it easier to say what they are *against* than what they are *for*.
- Having a zoning ordinance is not the same as having a plan. Zoning is a tool that helps implement the plan. Your plan tells why particular zoning provisions are necessary and justified, and why they serve a public purpose. Having a plan helps a community defend its zoning ordinance when and if specific zoning provisions are challenged in court.
- People who speak the loudest and are most vociferous in calling attention to their views are not necessarily representative of the community as a whole. Make sure you devise a planning process that draws out the views of a cross section of citizens.
- Striking the right balance and charting a middle course is difficult, but possible. Look for “win-win” solutions.
- Intergovernmental communication and cooperation is essential in achieving land use planning objectives. Consult and seek the advice of neighboring communities before adopting plans and policies that may have an effect on those communities. If you do, then you have reason to hope and expect that they will do the same when and if they consider plans and policies that may have an effect on *your* community.
- Planning needs to be ongoing to be successful. You can’t just prepare a plan and then forget about it. For a plan to be effective, it needs to be referred to and used as the basis for making land use and development decisions.
- Revisit the plan from time to time and be sure to evaluate how it is working.

- Don't allow your plan to become obsolete or ineffective. If it isn't working as intended, change it! If, after a certain length of time, parts of the plan are no longer current, revise and update those portions. Don't allow the validity of an entire plan to be undermined by allowing a portion of the plan to become obsolete.

When Should You Update an Existing Plan?

Most communities in New Hampshire have some form of an adopted plan. Whether it is an older comprehensive plan or a relatively new master plan, it does not really matter so long as it is being used and implemented. If your plan is not being used, you should find out why and proceed to update it or replace it with a new plan.

Most planners agree that, if an existing plan is well over seven years old and significant changes have occurred since it was prepared, your community may need a completely new plan. However, if your existing master plan is about five years old, it may only need to be revised or updated. It is usually less expensive and less time-consuming to update an existing plan than it is to prepare a new plan.

In fact, it is highly recommended that all master plans be updated every five years. In some cases, all that may be required is an updating of relevant data and information, findings, and recommendations. The overall goals of the plan and the visions for the community may still be relevant. If your existing master plan is in a loose-leaf binder or in electronic format, the updating process can be easily accomplished without the expense of printing a new plan.

Daniels, Keller, and Lapping in the *Small Town Planning Handbook* (APA Press 1995), prepared the following checklist (on page 92) to help communities decide when it is necessary to update an existing plan. If your community meets these guidelines, do not wait too long to begin the process of updating your plan.

Different Ways to Plan

Although the purpose and intent of planning is fairly simple to understand, there are many different ways to approach the task of preparing a master plan. Before you decide which chapters to include in your plan, you will need to ask: (1) Which planning approach should I follow? and (2) What type of master plan should I prepare? How you answer the first question will determine how you proceed with the next. The type of master plan that you prepare is directly related to the planning approach you employ.

The Various Approaches to Planning

While there is no one right way to plan, there are several ways to do it and several types of plans that you can prepare. One aim of this handbook is to help you decide which planning approach and what type of plan would be best for you. There are five generally accepted approaches to planning.

1. Comprehensive planning
2. Issue-oriented planning
3. Functional planning
4. Strategic planning
5. Vision-based planning

It is best to select an approach and stay with it as you prepare your master plan. However, if you find that that approach is not working, for whatever reason, there is no reason why you cannot stop and change direction. Moreover, you may find that a combination of approaches is more useful than just one. Perhaps you need to be comprehensive in your scope, but more visionary or strategic in your goals and policies. Flexibility in planning is important and often necessary. Equally important is preparing the best and most successful plan possible for your community (see chart on page 102).

When Is It Necessary to Update an Existing Master Plan?

1. Your existing plan is more than five years old.
True ____ False ____
2. Your town's public services are no longer able to meet current and projected future needs.
True ____ False ____
3. Your existing plan does not contain an economic development chapter.
True ____ False ____
4. Your existing plan does not address current and future housing needs.
True ____ False ____
5. Your existing plan does not discuss community water quality and supply needs and sewage and solid waste disposal.
True ____ False ____
6. Your map of existing land uses is not up to date.
True ____ False ____
7. Your zoning map does not agree with your map of desired future land uses.
True ____ False ____
8. Your zoning ordinance is no longer consistent with the goals and objectives of your plan.
True ____ False ____
9. Your existing plan lacks an inventory of environmental features, such as natural areas, wildlife habitats, prime agricultural land, wetlands, natural hazards, and areas with development limitations.
True ____ False ____
10. Your plan lacks any maps of community facilities and service areas.
True ____ False ____

If you answered "true" to a majority of the above questions, it is likely that you need to update your existing plan.

1. Comprehensive Planning

Comprehensive planning is the traditional approach to town planning. It covers

- a broad range of topics
- a wide geographic area
- a long time span

Comprehensive planning follows the traditional four-step planning process: the identification of problems and issues; the establishment of goals and objectives; data collection and analysis; and plan

preparation and implementation (see Chapter 2, "The Master Planning Process," and NH OEP Technical Bulletin 3, *Formulating the Master Plan*, Summer 2003).

The distinguishing features of comprehensive planning are that it covers a wide range of topics, is ambitious in requiring numerous studies that take time to complete, and is long range in scope (typically covering a 10- to 20-year period). (For more information about comprehensive planning, refer to the reports and publications identified in Chapter 12, "Bibliography/Resources.")

2. Issue-Oriented Planning

Some communities do not get around to planning until a problem or a crisis has occurred. Issue-oriented planning focuses attention on the problems and issues of greatest concern to a community at a particular point in time. This is an “old-fashioned approach” to planning, in that it is designed to identify and address narrowly defined, specific community problems and issues above all else.

What Is Involved?

Community members are brought together to identify and prioritize the pressing issues facing the community. There are many ways to bring people together (refer to Chapter 10, “Tools and Techniques,” for a variety of citizen participation examples). Once the issues have been identified, you develop first a process to rank them and then a plan to address the most pressing issues.

Advantages of This Approach

This is the classic approach to defining the scope and contents of a master plan; the reasons to plan are well-documented. People are more naturally inclined to support a community effort that addresses pressing issues than they are a top-down approach that imposes a process upon the community.

Does This Approach Make Sense in Your Community?

An issue-oriented approach to planning makes the most sense for a community that has a pressing land use issue or problem, and when there is broad agreement within the community that the problem needs to be addressed. This approach is also effective for communities that have little or no prior experience in developing a plan. By focusing on a particular issue, the community increases the likelihood of succeeding with its planning effort.

3. Functional Planning

It is not necessary to produce all of the chapters in a master plan at one time. What is important is that you make progress in addressing the important issues and choices facing your community. Perhaps

one or two topic areas are more important in your community right now than others. For example, a lot of energy these days is being directed towards addressing transportation concerns. Perhaps there is pending a well-publicized transportation improvement, a new highway or bypass, or a parking garage that will take up precious space downtown. If this is the case, it might make sense to address and complete 1 or 2 chapters of your plan first, and other chapters later on. This can be accomplished through functional planning. In many ways, functional planning is a slower version of comprehensive planning.

Is This Approach Right for You?

This approach might be right for your community if one or two issues are of pressing concern or if there is a lack of support on the part of the local leadership for comprehensive planning. It might also be a viable option if there are insufficient funds to permit the completion of a comprehensive plan.

4. Strategic Planning

Strategic planning is defined as “a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization (or other entity) is, what it does, and why it does it” (Bryson, p. xii and p. 5). It has also been defined as “the process of the development of strategies for the accomplishment of specified goals and objectives with respect to a set of issues” (Kaufman and Jacobs).

There appears to be no widely accepted definition of strategic planning as it is applied to local government. However, strategic planning offers local government a new planning approach.

The strategic planning process begins with the identification of key decision makers in the community and its “stakeholders” (those individuals or groups with an interest in the outcome of the decisions made as a result of the planning process). The next step in the process is to identify strategic issues by making a “situation assessment,” sometimes known as the analysis of “strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats” (SWOTs). Major emphasis should be placed on the selection and application of strategies to resolve identified issues and attain desired goals. The principal steps in strategic planning are

1. Scan the environment and select key issues.
2. Formulate goals or missions for the key issues.
3. Analyze each issue, developing a list of community strengths and weaknesses.
4. Develop strategies that are realistic and take into account those strengths and weaknesses.
5. Implement strategies using public and private resources.
6. Monitor and update the plan to ensure implementation.

Strategic planning and traditional comprehensive planning have a great deal in common. Both processes are based on the concept of goal-setting and the identification of decision makers and stakeholders. Strategic planning tends to narrow the range of stakeholders, while comprehensive planning tends to cast a wide net. This makes strategic planning more manageable; it's easier to reach a consensus through strategic than through comprehensive planning. On the other hand, comprehensive planning may develop a broader base of citizen support. Neither planning approach is going to be very successful in communities where there are wide differences in values and positions among citizens.

Strategic planning appears to focus its data collection and analysis on situation assessment. What are the issues? What forces bear on the issues? Comprehensive planning, on the other hand, often produces an insatiable appetite for data and data analysis; it can become an expensive and time-consuming fetish.

There appears to be little consensus as to the timeline for strategic plans – some say it should be long-range (20 years), and some say short-range (3 to 5 years). Comprehensive plans prepared by traditional methods usually work on a long-range timeline, though occasionally the timeline can be short-range.

The strength of strategic planning lies in its consideration of the methods that are to be used to attain the desired vision of the future, the goals of the plan. In other words, emphasis is placed on plan implementation. Strategic planning, in that sense, can be considered “pro-active” and comprehensive planning “reactive.”

Strategic planning is best applied when you are concentrating on one topic, or a few topics, at a time. Comprehensive planning requires consideration of a very broad range of topics that affect the quality of life in a community, all at one time. It is probable, therefore, that strategic planning can be accomplished more quickly and efficiently than comprehensive planning.

For these reasons, strategic planning is not well suited to the preparation of the traditional comprehensive plan or to the contemplation of long-range issues, which often evade clear definition, and which involve a multitude of interrelated topics.

However, strategic planning appears to be well suited to the consideration of immediate problems and to the identification of strategies to resolve them in the near future. It therefore may be classified as short-range in nature.

5. Vision-Based Planning

Vision-based planning, instead of looking primarily at community issues and trying to solve them, imagines what a community should look like in the future and then develops a plan to achieve that vision. This visioning process is unique, but it is often included as an element of a variety of master plans. It is a positive approach to planning and can be very inspiring.

What Is Involved?

Your goal is to analyze past and current trends, seeking to answer such questions as “Where have we been?” and “Where are we going?” – then to step back and ask the community, “Where do we want to go?” You want to create a shared vision of the kind of community you hope to achieve within a certain number of years. Presumably there will be a difference between where you are going and where you want to go, so you develop a plan to move the community toward its desired future.

Does This Approach Make Sense in Your Community?

A vision-based approach to planning is likely to work best in environments where people are willing

and able to join collectively in group processes, to share their views, and to listen respectfully to one another. It does not work as well in hostile environments where people are antagonistic.

A vision-based approach can also work well in communities where there are charismatic leaders who are willing to serve as conveners, and in communities that have planning staff who are skilled in facilitating group process sessions, charrettes, and the like. (For more information about the visioning process, see Chapter 5, “Community Visioning.”)

The Different Types of Master Plans

There are five types of master plans.

1. The comprehensive master plan
2. The small-area master plan
3. The functional master plan
4. The strategic master plan
5. The abridged master plan

Each type of master plan has distinguishing features and characteristics, as well as unique advantages and disadvantages in its development and application (see chart on page 103).

1. The Comprehensive Master Plan

The comprehensive plan has three unique characteristics: (1) it includes a broad range of master plan elements (all fifteen chapters); (2) it encompasses the entire municipality; and (3) it employs a long-range view (usually 10 to 20 years into the future).

The preparation of a comprehensive plan is the most ambitious undertaking of all plan types. It typically takes more time and costs more than any other kind of master plan. Yet it is the most common and traditional approach to planning. It addresses all the relevant topics and issues affecting a community's future and may include chapters on such topics as education, construction materials, open space, and travel and tourism, as determined by the community.

Preparing a comprehensive plan may be right for your community if the following circumstances apply:

1. There is a good track record of past planning success.
2. Your community already has a comprehensive master plan in place.
3. Local leadership supports long-range planning.
4. There are a variety of topics that should be studied on a community-wide basis.
5. There are no major planning issues or problems that need immediate attention.
6. The community can afford to take a year or more to prepare the plan.

The disadvantages of a comprehensive plan are

1. It is expensive and time consuming and requires the collection of a wide variety of data that must be analyzed.
2. The public participation processes may take a long time to complete and may be difficult to organize. It is usually much harder to get citizens from a broad spectrum of the population to consider a wide range of topics than it is to get them to consider a narrow range of topics.
3. Sometimes the tendency to recommend actions concerning the distant future closes off options better left open.
4. It is difficult to secure commitments for, and participation in, long-term projects.
5. Long-range plans tend not to be useful as the basis for compiling short-range capital improvement programs, as they tend to contain statements of general policy rather than descriptions of specific projects.
6. Long-range plans are not particularly well suited to serving as guides for short-term zoning decisions; this can cause problems, as zoning is required to be consistent with the comprehensive plan.
7. The means to implement long-range plans are often not apparent, or do not exist, while the plan is being prepared or reviewed. This introduces substantial uncertainty into the planning process.
8. Most people, including the public, have difficulty conceptualizing future conditions. With no clearly defined path, the public can become bewildered when thinking about how to get from where we are today to where we want to be a generation from now.

9. Comprehensive plans are lengthy and often contain more data and information than can be easily read and digested. Also they are costly to print and publish.

2. The Small-Area Master Plan

Small-area plans have the following unique characteristics: (1) they address specific districts, neighborhoods, or small geographical areas within a community; (2) they are generally mid-range (5 to 10 years) in scope; and (3) they cover multiple topics, but tend to contain greater specificity on a small-area basis than does a comprehensive plan.

It is desirable to prepare small-area plans for all the geographical areas of your community, if time and budget permit. However, given limited resources, small area plans should at least be prepared for those areas where changes are either occurring or anticipated, such as

- central business districts (downtown revitalization)
- historic preservation districts
- threatened open space preservation areas
- redevelopment areas
- high growth areas with many subdivisions, or where a high concentration of commercial and industrial growth is anticipated
- areas where there is a high interest in community design

Because small-area plans contain specific development recommendations for the area being studied, these plans can then be combined to form one complete master plan for your community. Comprehensive plans often include small-area plans that address certain regions, areas, or neighborhoods within a community. In this fashion, all of the fifteen sections of the master plan (see Chapter 3, “What Should Be Included in Your Master Plan”) can be addressed on both a community-wide and a small-area basis.

A small-area plan may be right for your community if the following applies:

- Planning for the entire municipality is not feasible at one time.
- Your community already has neighborhood plans in place.
- There is local leadership and support for planning within each geographical area.
- Your community is highly fragmented (divided both physically and socially).
- Certain areas of the community are changing more rapidly than others.
- You can combine your small-area plans into a complete community-wide master plan.

The disadvantages of a small-area plan are

- You may not be able to combine your small-area plans into a complete community-wide master plan.
- It does not adequately address changes, problems, or issues that are consistent across the community and need to be addressed on a community-wide basis.
- It diverts attention away from community-wide problems and issues and focuses most on special areas.

3. The Functional Master Plan

Functional plans are plans prepared for one specific topic, with tie-ins to related subjects. Some examples are flood hazard mitigation, mass transit plans, bicycle paths, housing, and open space. Functional plans have the following characteristics: (1) they address one master plan element or subsection at a time; (2) they may cover an entire community or a sub-section thereof; (3) they may be either short-range (1 to 5 years) or long-range (10 to 20 years) in scope; and (4) they can stand alone as a separate plan or be combined as part of the community's master plan.

Most long-range functional plans covering a specific subject or topic on a community-wide basis could be appropriate as an element in a community's master plan. For example, a ground water management and protection plan that covers the entire community could be an element of the master plan.

Short-range functional plans that address subsections of the community are often quite specific. Local circumstances will usually determine whether they are suitable for inclusion as elements of a master plan, or whether they should be treated as stand-alone plans. In either case, short-range functional plans should be consistent with long-range functional plans, and all functional plans should be consistent with the overall community master plan (Anderson, 1995).

Preparing a functional plan may be right for your community if the following applies:

1. Planning for the entire municipality is not feasible at one time.
2. It makes more sense to complete 1 or 2 master plan elements first and then address the other 13 or 14 master plan elements later on.
3. Your community already has in place a number of functional plans for various elements of your master plan.
4. You can make better progress in achieving the development of a community-wide master plan one element at a time.
5. There are one or two issues or topics of major concern in your community or there is a lack of support on the part of the community power brokers for preparing or updating the master plan at one time.
6. The financial support available for planning is insufficient to permit you to develop a full-blown master plan at one time.
7. You can combine your functional plans into a complete community-wide master plan in the future.

The disadvantages of a functional plan are that

- It is a slow process that takes years to complete, if at all.
- It does not adequately address changes, problems, or issues that are consistent across the community and/or need to be addressed on a community-wide basis.
- It directs attention away from community-wide problems by focusing on special problems or topic areas.

- It may not address all fifteen elements of the master plan, as provided for by state statutes (this does not represent a legal concern, however, as only two of the elements are mandatory by state law).

4. The Strategic Master Plan

The strategic master plan is a version of the comprehensive plan. However, unlike small-area plans and functional plans that can become component parts of a composite master plan, the goal when preparing a strategic master plan is to identify a small number of issues that are the most important to a community's overall vitality, today and in the future, and then take action on those issues to ensure the best possible future for the community.

The basic characteristics of a strategic master plan are: (1) it is narrowly focused on what have been determined to be the most pressing and important issues of your community; (2) it can be either short-range (2 to 5 years) or long-range (10 to 20 years) in scope; (3) it encompasses the entire area of your community; and (4) the elements, or chapters, that are included in the plan are based on the priority issues identified by the community.

A strategic master plan may be right for your community because

- It does not try to address all issues.
- It can employ either a short- or long-range perspective.
- It introduces a regional perspective to local planning by forcing people to compare the relative strengths and weaknesses of their community with those of others in the region.
- It reminds participants that their community is in competition with other communities in attempting to attract desired land uses, industries, investments, funding, and the like. The community must devise and implement workable strategies.
- It can increase a community's competitive advantage by transforming perceived local weaknesses into strengths. Strategic planning is generally recommended in communities that are experiencing stagnation, decline, and/or diminishing

investments and that need to think realistically about their options and to develop practical strategies in a regional context.

The disadvantages of preparing a strategic master plan are that

- It is not truly comprehensive in that it diverts attention away from less important issues and problems that must be addressed on a community-wide basis.
- It does not include all the sections of a comprehensive plan.

5. The Abridged Master Plan

Abridged plans consist primarily of the vision and land use chapters, which are mandated by state law. None, or only a few, of the traditional, now optional, elements of the master plan – such as an implementation section and a chapter on natural resources – are included. As required by state statute, the abridged master plan must be based on a community visioning process. It must also be based on studies of population, economic activity, and natural, historical, and cultural resources, as needed to prepare the land use chapter. Those studies are then used to complete a series of maps and to develop goals and action plans.

The general characteristics of the abridged master plan are: (1) it primarily includes the two mandatory sections of the master plan as required by state statutes; (2) it encompasses the entire geographical area of the community; and (3) it is mid-range (5 to 10 years) in scope.

The abridged master plan is appropriate for communities with fewer than 10,000 people, where no professional planners are on staff, and where community volunteers and planning board members can assume much of the work. It may be useful for some communities of over 10,000 people, but those communities may also be financially able to develop long-range comprehensive plans with full-time professional planners on staff.

The following guidelines are offered for the preparation of an abridged master plan:

1. A planning process should be established that allows community residents and volunteers to prepare the bulk of the plan. Local residents should be encouraged to offer ideas, conduct research, collect data and prepare reports. A professional planner may be helpful in preparing parts of the abridged plan, especially the land-use section, but it should not be required that a professional draft the plan.

2. The municipality should ask for assistance from the University of New Hampshire Cooperative Extension Office in conducting the community visioning process through its Community Profile Project. (Refer to Chapter 5, “Community Visioning,” and Chapter 10, “Tools and Techniques,” for more information about the community visioning process and the UNH Cooperative Extension Community Profile Project.)

3. The amount of information to be included in the plan must be flexible and need only serve the interests of the community and meet the basic legal requirements of the state statute. Foremost among these is that the plan should always include a land use plan and maps that show both the present and the future (desired) land use pattern in the community. **Click here to launch A Step-By-Step Guide for How to Prepare a Future Land Use Map.** A flexible planning document will facilitate effective updates and express new community goals or present new strategies for achieving current goals.

4. The plan must be a valid document upon which to base (a) land use regulations and (b) advance planning efforts to aid in the efficient use of community resources, such as the capital improvement program, community development initiatives, and the revitalization of town centers.

5. The plan must be reasonably inexpensive to prepare. It should no more than 50 to 100 pages in length. The objective should be to produce a plan for under \$10,000, exclusive of printing costs.

The cost of an abridged master plan will tend to increase with the size of the community and the level of involvement by planning consultants and/or regional planning commissions.

Generally, the smaller the town, the lower the cost, as fewer data sources are needed; but this is not a hard and fast rule. Many communities with populations of fewer than 2,000 people do not have readily available data, and it can be expensive to collect. This handbook encourages communities to make use of local volunteer help whenever possible. While professional assistance may be needed in certain areas such as land use, natural resources, and economic development, it is recommended that you contact county, regional, and state agencies and the cooperative extension service for planning assistance. It is also recommended that your community not overlook graduate and undergraduate programs in community planning. It might be possible to arrange for a small team of students, under faculty supervision, to assist in preparing your plan. Often volunteers are able to provide the necessary information and services at a much lower cost than would be charged by a private consultant.

6. The final suggestion is that an abridged plan should be timely. It should be completed within a year, reviewed annually, and updated every 3 to 5 years. The best time to prepare the plan, especially for communities of over 2,500 showing active growth, is within the third to sixth year of each decade. This is because the plan relies heavily on data collected by the US Census of Population and Housing. Preliminary census results are usually available one full year after the beginning of each decade. This data will remain useful for several years, but as time passes between census counts, new estimates and projections will begin to be needed.

The advantages of preparing an abridged master plan are that

- It is relatively easy and inexpensive to create, and community volunteers can perform most of the work (thus, professional assistance may not be needed).
- It is not necessary to address all fifteen sections of the master plan as described by state statutes. Only the two mandatory sections, on visioning and land use, are required.

- It can employ either a short-range or a long-range perspective.
- It can be initiated and carried out by local citizens working with the planning board.
- It can be readily tied into local capital improvement programs and other advanced planning initiatives.
- It can be easily updated.

A disadvantage of preparing an abridged master plan is that it is not comprehensive.

No matter what type of plan is developed, your community's master plan should at least

- provide a concise baseline of data about your town's environment, natural and cultural resources, population, housing stock, economic base, needs, and opportunities
- include a description of the trends that have affected your community and make projections about how those trends might continue or change in the future
- articulate a shared community vision of what you want your town or city to be like in the future
- outline the growth management policies and objectives that are to shape your local regulations and guide your public decisions.

Which Master Plan Makes the Most Sense for Your Community?

Now that you have a good understanding of the different planning approaches and the basic types of master plans, it should be much easier to determine which master plan makes the most sense for your community. The following charts on page 102 and 103 can help you in making this decision.

As summarized by the planners who prepared *Planner on a Disc*, a master plan is generally intended to

- portray a vision for the future
- establish goals and objectives for land use, development, community facilities, and infrastructure

- examine the past changes and current trends to project future trends
- identify community-wide issues and concerns
- identify a community's weaknesses and strengths
- express the desires, aims, wishes, and ambitions of the community
- chart a course for growth and change
- promote the public interest and core virtues of the community
- build support and consensus around ideas
- identify alternatives
- offer recommendations and guidelines for decision-makers
- shape growth policies
- establish a foundation for implementing land use regulations
- set forth strategies, actions, and recommendations
- set forth guiding principles and concepts

Other Related Community Plans

Downtown Revitalization Plan

Your community may have undertaken downtown development projects or participated in a Main Street Program that required some planning or documentation for a grant. If you have a solid downtown plan that is supported by your community, you should try to integrate the major components of this plan into your master plan and concentrate on implementing critical downtown strategies that will benefit the community.

Economic Development Plan

A good economic development plan charts the course for establishing or maintaining a sustainable local economy that offers employment opportunities for local residents, opportunities for existing and new businesses, and a healthy revenue source for your community. Often these plans are prepared by your regional planning commission or your local economic development commission on behalf of your community. If your community has adopted such a plan, the major elements and recommendations of that plan should be included in your master plan, particularly in the chapter on economic development.

Open Space Plan

Many communities across the state are developing open space plans to ensure that adequate open land – including natural areas, forests, playing fields, and hiking trails – is protected in the future. Often these plans are prepared by your regional planning commission on behalf of your community. The major components of these plans should be integrated into your master plan, particularly in the chapters on natural resources and recreation.

Tourism and Historic Preservation Plans

Quite often, detailed tourism or historic preservation plans have been prepared for your community that identify needs and outline a course of action. These plans have short- and long-term recommendations that can be referenced or incorporated into your master plan; they can save you many hours of research and can help to establish your community's goals in the areas of economic development and cultural and historical resources.

Transportation Corridor Plans

Your community may also have separate transportation or corridor plans, indicating road pavement conditions, road construction information, right-of-way characteristics, traffic characteristics, proposed improvements, and the like, which have been adopted as formal reports. Some community public works and highway departments maintain less formal plans in the form of road condition maps, upgrade and maintenance priority lists, or historical road reports. Sidewalk plans, rail corridors, and bicycle facilities are often incorporated into transportation plans; in some cases, these may be separate functional plans themselves. Large development proposals may also require traffic impact analysis to determine the future adequacy of the local transportation network. All of these plans can be useful in the transportation chapter of your master plan.

Natural Hazards Mitigation Plan

See discussion on page 21.

Master Plan Examples:

Provided below is a sampling of master plans from various municipalities across the state. These plans are identified for informational purposes only and are not a list of recommended plans.

Comprehensive Master Plans

Goffstown Master Plan, Goffstown, NH, 1997
(see: <http://www.townofgoftstown.nh.us/planning/masterplan.shtml>)

Town of Raymond, NH, Master Plan, 2002
(see: <http://www.raymond-nh.com/masterplan.pdf>)

Small-Area Master Plans

Concord 2020 (in process)
(see: <http://www.onconcord.com/>)

Portsmouth Master Plan 2003 (in process)
(see: <http://www.cityofportsmouth.com/masterplan/index.html>)

Functional Master Plans

City of Keene Master Plan, 1993-97
Not available on-line at this time.

Strategic Master Plans

Strategic Master Plan Update 2000, Bedford, NH
Not available on-line at this time.

Visionary Master Plans

Nashua Master Plan
(see www.gonashua.com)

Relationship Between Planning Approach and Type of Master Plan

	Comprehensive Master Plan	Small-Area Master Plan	Functional Master Plan	Strategic Master Plan	The Abridged Master Plan
Comprehensive Planning	★	★			
Issue-Oriented Planning	★	★			
Single-Topic Planning			★		
Strategic Planning				★	★
Vision-Based Planning	★	★	★	★	★

Key Features of Master Plan Types

	Comprehensive Master Plan	Small-Area Master Plan	Functional Master Plan	Strategic Master Plan	Abridged Master Plan
Distinguishing Features	Comprehensive, ambitious, broad and general. Encompasses the entire community.	Focuses on small areas or regions of the community. Individual plans can be combined to form a completed master plan.	Focuses on one or two specific topics or elements at a time. Individual plans can be combined to form a completed master plan.	Realistic - does not try to address all issues or elements, but focuses on the strategic issues and elements that are the most pressing.	Focuses primarily on land use. Less ambitious, more general. Encompasses the entire community.
Scope	Long-Range (10-20 yrs.)	Middle-Range (5-10 yrs.)	Middle-Range (5-10 yrs.)	Short- (2-4 yrs) to Long-Range (10-20 yrs.)	Short- (2-4 yrs.) to Middle-Range (5-10 yrs.)
Key Elements (Chapters)	Includes most, if not all, of the 15 elements or chapters as provided by state statutes.	Includes most, if not all, of the 15 elements or chapters as provided by state statutes.	Looks only at one or two elements at a time on a comprehensive, community-wide basis.	Includes some of the basic 15 elements but focuses mainly on the key strategic issues/topic areas.	Includes only the 2 mandatory elements - the vision and land use sections.
Relative Cost	High	Low to Medium	Low to Medium	Medium	Low
Relative Time Commitment	Long - 1 to 2 years (depending on size of community)	Short to Medium - 3 to 6 months	Short to Medium - 3 to 6 months	Short to Medium - 3 to 6 months	Short to Medium - 3 to 6 months